

# Israel and Peace — Is Forgiveness Possible?



PROCESSED

JUG 01 2018

LIBRARY

✠ The INQUIRER £1

[www.inquirer.org.uk](http://www.inquirer.org.uk)

The voice of British and Irish Unitarians and Free Christians Issue 7884 13 February 2016



# The INQUIRER

THE UNITARIAN AND FREE CHRISTIAN PAPER

Established 1842

The Inquirer is the oldest

Nonconformist religious newspaper

**"To promote a free and inquiring religion through the worship of God and the celebration of life; the service of humanity and respect for all creation; and the upholding of the liberal Christian tradition."**

*From the Object passed at the General Assembly of the Unitarian and Free Christian Churches 2001*

The Inquirer is published fortnightly by The Inquirer Publishing Company (2004), Registered Charity 1101039.

Editor M Colleen Burns MA

46A Newmarket Road

Cringleford

Norwich NR4 6UF

ph: 01603 505281

e: [inquirer@btinternet.com](mailto:inquirer@btinternet.com)

Copyeditor Sarah Reynolds

Cover 'Armoured Dove' painted by Banksy. Photo by Pawel Ryszawa via Wikimedia Commons

**Articles** express the views of their authors. Submissions are welcome and may be edited for content and length. They should be emailed or typed and should be the author's original work or be attributed appropriately.

**Subscribe** Annual subscriptions are £35 with discounts for bulk orders. Cheques payable to 'The Inquirer'.

Write to James Barry

24 Lodge Lane

Keymer, Hassocks

West Sussex, BN6 8NA

ph: 01273 844940

e: [admin@inquirer.org.uk](mailto:admin@inquirer.org.uk)

**Advertise** for £6 per column cm, on 3-col page, plus VAT or £7.50 per col cm, on a 2-col page. A one-page supplement is £200. One column on a 2-col page is £100, on a 3-col page, £75. A5 fliers may be inserted for £95 plus VAT.

**Births, marriages and deaths** are 50p a word plus VAT.

**Find out more** about Unitarians

[www.unitarian.org.uk](http://www.unitarian.org.uk)

or email [info@unitarian.org.uk](mailto:info@unitarian.org.uk)

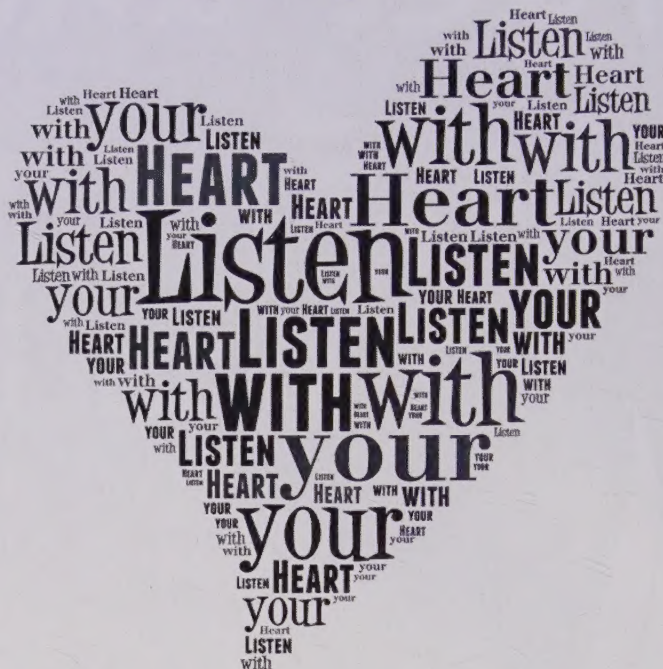
The General Assembly, Essex Hall

1-6 Essex Street

London WC2R 3HY

ph: 0207 2402384

## Inquiring Words



## Help send children to Hucklow

Sharp-eyed readers of *The Inquirer* may have noticed that the Send-a-Child-to-Hucklow leaflet, promised in the columns of the Christmas issue, was missing. Owing to an error by *The Inquirer's* printing company, the leaflets were left on a warehouse floor. You should find one between the pages of this issue of *The Inquirer*. (Crossing my fingers now.)

The SACH board hopes to raise in excess of £50,000 to provide holidays for underprivileged children at the Nightingale Unitarian Conference Centre at Great Hucklow. It costs approximately £350 for each child and SACH hopes to serve 200 youngsters this year. Fourteen groups have already confirmed their participation. The children spend much-needed time hiking across the Peak District, enjoying the hospitality of the Nightingale Centre and – as they inevitably mention in their comments – eating three wonderful meals each day.

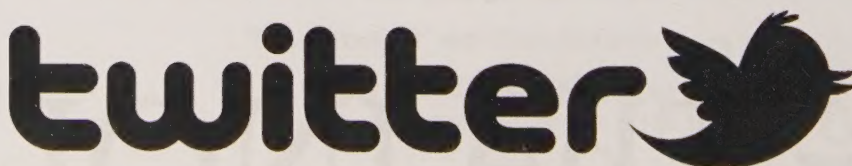
Many Unitarians are familiar with the magic of Great Hucklow, with the tranquillity, the beauty and the welcoming hospitality of the Nightingale Centre.

So, although Christmas is normally a time for charitable giving, please consider making a donation now. Don't allow a printer warehouse worker's mistake to deny a holiday to a child who needs one. Follow the directions on the (hopefully, enclosed) leaflet, or go directly to the SACH website ([www.sendachildtohucklow.org.uk](http://www.sendachildtohucklow.org.uk)) and give what you are able.

– MC Burns

Editor of *The Inquirer*

Member of the Send-a-Child-to-Hucklow Board of Trustees



Follow @The\_\_Inquirer (two underscores) on Twitter. A little shot of Unitarian news and faith in 140 characters. <https://twitter.com/>



To win a truly great life for the people of Israel, a great peace is necessary, not a fictitious peace, the dwarfish peace that is no more than a feeble intermission, but a true peace with the neighbouring peoples, which alone can render possible a common development of this portion of the earth as the vanguard of the awakening Near East.

– Martin Buber, Austrian and Israeli religious philosopher from his book “A Land of Two Peoples” (1945)



Bethlehem wall painting by the artist Banksy in 2007. Photo by Pawel Ryszawa via Wikimedia Commons.

# Can forgiveness break the deadlock?

By Iain Brown

There are huge evolutionary advantages in co-operation. As the biologist, EO Wilson, long ago pointed out, the most successful species on earth are man, the outstandingly co-operative ape, and the ants, the brilliantly co-operative insect. Co-operation means peace. Dynastic families that feud lose power and status; political parties that are divided lose elections. An important factor in the maintenance of peace within the social group or clan is a common culture of beliefs, values and understandings or a religion. The very word ‘religion’ is understood to mean the Latin for ‘binding together’. All this co-operation, the bonding together of parents and children, of partners in child-rearing, of work parties and of warriors in effective units is essential for survival and the cult of love, central to religions and especially prominent in Christian churches, can be a major re-enforcer of that.

Although loyalty and love may be the core of the nuclear family, sometimes this takes a deviant form. What we may call Mafioso ethics are practised where the family or tribal member is expected to behave to the highest ethical standards with people of his or her own group but can do anything they like to people outside the family, and will be supported in doing so by the family members.

There are Ten Commandments for the guidance of behaviour towards one another within the tribe but none specifically about how to behave with outsiders, with infidels, with Gypsies. Sometimes the assumption may be that you treat them as you would members of your group or tribe but often there is no such assumption. Raids on neighbouring tribal groups have taken place

from the beginnings of humanity. It is interesting that the chimpanzees, among the species on earth with which we most closely share genes, are the only great ape which does the same. Usually it is a group of males who descend on a neighbouring group, kill their males, rob them of their portable food and tools and rape their women before carrying them off as slaves. Human behaviour in wars between nations can still look quite a lot like these raids.

In most of the great religions of the world there seems to be much about individual ethics and love and forgiveness between individuals but very little about *tribal* ethics, about the ways in which we can best relate to one another in groups for the greater good. And there is still less in world religious heritage about inter-tribal forgiveness. The ethic of Jesus, as it is presented to us in the ancient writings, is, I believe, amongst world religions, almost uniquely inclusive. He was presented as dining with the despised and the hated of his time in a way that, to my knowledge, no other great religious teacher ever was. Jesus, too, in the reports of the Samaritan is presented as being appreciative of the stranger, of the alien tribe. Did he extend that binding love that is the ground of our great evolutionary advantage beyond the home tribe? As far as I am aware, Paul has no such Jesus-like extra-tribal tendencies. The Christ of Paul had much to say about individual forgiveness but little or nothing to say about reconciliation between, say, Jews and Romans.

Most of you will not need reminding that the present nexus of hate and fear in the Middle East involves the possibility that there could be five states with nuclear bombs, each living too closely in fear and hatred of most of the others, and each with the potential to make a pre-emptive strike. There are American

(Continued on page 6)



# Bowland trust gives GA a lump sum

## **Executive Committee 11/12 January Key Messages**

### **1. Bowland Trust**

For the last 10 years the General Assembly has received regular and generous financial support from the Bowland Trust which has sustained its activities and programmes at a national level by matching "live giving". The EC is extremely grateful to the Bowland Trust for this critically important support.

Originally these payments were intended to continue for a further 10 years until 2025/26. But the Bowland Trust and the Executive Committee have now agreed that the funding from the Bowland Trust will come to an end this year with a single donation of £1.5M. This represents an amount slightly in excess of what we might have expected to receive over the full term of the original agreement.

This single large donation presents opportunities as well as challenges for the long-term sustainability of the Unitarian Movement and the Executive Committee will be carefully considering the implications as part of its wider strategic work on our Vision for the Future.

### **2. Resignation of Executive Committee member**

It was with regret that the Executive Committee received the resignation of James Barry. We would like to thank James for all his work on the EC since April 2013.

### **3. Millennium Fund Grant**

£5,000 was awarded to Dukinfield Old Chapel to support professional fees in connection with their major

repairs and conservation project. This grant fulfilled a commitment given to them last year and previous to the EC's decision that as of September 2015 the Millennium Fund would be closed to new applicants and the remaining funds allocated to support activities arising from the Vision Project.

### **4. Annual Accounts 2014-15**

The Annual Accounts of the General Assembly and of the Nightingale Centre were approved. Both had performed well financially. The Annual Accounts of the Sustentation Fund were received and they showed that grants of £16,800 in total had been paid to congregations to support ministry during the year.

### **5. "Turning Vision into Action" Day Follow-Up**

The Executive Committee spent considerable time reviewing the outcome of the "Turning Vision into Action" they held in Sheffield on 23 November 2015 and comments received since the successful event. There are lots of exciting ideas and proposals built around the six themes that emerged on the day and the key task of the Executive Committee is to prioritise them and develop them into a coherent plan for the future. This plan will be presented to this year's Annual Meetings for their support and approval, recognising that only if we all work together will these aims be successfully achieved.

– Column sponsored by the Executive Committee of the Unitarian General Assembly.

## *Chief Officer signs letter on faith schools*

### **Unitarians support call to retain free-school religious discrimination limit**

#### **By Derek McAuley**

I am one of signatories representing 16 civil society groups which have issued an open letter to the Secretary of State for Education, Nicky Morgan, urging that the Department for Education keeps in place the rule that faith free schools are only permitted to select half of their pupils on religious grounds. The letter follows the recommendation of Nick Timothy, Director of the New Schools Network – the government funded charity set up to support groups seeking to open new free schools – that the 50% admissions cap should be removed to boost free-school applications.

The letter, co-ordinated by the Accord Coalition for Inclusive Education, has been signed by groups with differing areas of expertise and varying religious and political affiliations, but who all agree that removing the 50% faith selection cap would be a backwards step.

The religious selection cap for faith-based free schools was introduced in the summer of 2010. It built on an approach developed by the outgoing Labour administration of limiting the proportion of pupil places that many sponsored Academy faith schools could allot on faith grounds to 50%.

The Unitarian General Assembly has placed on record its opposition to the expansion of schools with a religious foundation believing that education should be taking place in a multi-faith and non-sectarian environment. The establishment of faith-based free schools has only compounded the problem

however the religious selection cap has mitigated some of these. We already know that Unitarian and Free Christians are being excluded from some faith schools, and so fully understand the effects such a change could have on parents and children.

*Derek McAuley is Chief Officer of the Unitarian General Assembly.*

Dear Secretary of State,

We represent a wide range of stakeholders in education and are writing to urge you to retain the 50% cap on the religious selection of pupils attending Free Schools. In fact many think such limits on selection should be expanded.

Abolishing the cap would be an astonishingly regressive proposal and pander to those who wish to isolate pupils of their faith from wider society.

It also ignores the reality that faith-based free schools have managed successfully with it, and have found they have been able to both maintain their identity and be open to children from other backgrounds.

Far from changing the formula, it should be praised for proving that religion and social cohesion can co-exist.

We hope you will give serious consideration to these concerns and await your response.

*Signed: Rabbi Dr Jonathan Romain MBE, Chair, Accord Coalition for Inclusive Education, plus 15 other educational and religious leaders, including Derek McAuley, chief officer of the Unitarian General Assembly.*

29 January 2016



# Peace Fellowship's first century

By Sue Woolley

When the Peace Fellowship committee realised that our centenary was round the corner, the Rev John Carter, our chair, and I, our secretary, decided to spend a day browsing among the Fellowship's archives, which are held at Harris Manchester College, Oxford. We found some fascinating stuff...

The Unitarian and Free Christian Peace Fellowship, to give us our full title, 'was formally constituted on June 13th 1916, at a representative meeting held at 47, New Broad Street, London, the offices of the Peace Society', to quote Walter M Long, author of a pamphlet issued in 1919. 'Stanley A. Mellor was in the chair, and it was then resolved "that a Unitarian and Free Christian Peace Fellowship be formed to include members of the Unitarian, Free Christian and kindred congregations, who believe that war and preparations for war are irreconcilable with the spirit and teaching of Jesus Christ, and who pledge themselves to work for the cause of Peace on this basis."'

It was also agreed that this Fellowship should co-operate with similar faith Fellowships then being formed in other denominations, and work with them in conjunction with the Peace Society, as part of their wider mission. Throughout much of our history, we have been heavily involved in ecumenical peace work. One of our leading lights, the Rev Sidney Spencer, wrote several articles for the Fellowship of Reconciliation's journal, *Reconciliation*. Spencer was a prolific writer on themes of peace and mysticism.

This 1916 pledge to work for Peace was quite a brave move at that point in the Great War. Alan Ruston's marvellous article 'Unitarian attitudes towards World War I', published in *Transactions of the Unitarian Historical Society* in 1998, reveals that many Unitarians of the time were quite ardent supporters of the war effort, although they were united in their condemnation of the harsh treatment of conscientious objectors.

Of the founding of the Peace Fellowship, Alan remarks: 'there was a good measure of support, but it cannot be claimed that the aims of the Peace Fellowship reflected the majority of opinion within Unitarianism.'

And so it has proved, down the years. Our search through the archives revealed a swelling of grass roots support through the denomination through the more pacifist 1930s. As late as 1938, the Rt Hon George Lansbury, MP, wrote in our Annual Report, that 'we were now past the stage where it was necessary to argue against war, as nearly everyone admitted that it was a ghastly evil. Since the dawn of history all empires built on force had fallen, only to be replaced by stronger material forces which have brought us today to our present impasse. If another war came, this civilisation would follow Babylon and Rome. Unitarians had freed themselves from superstition, and they prided themselves on their right to break away from old ideas.

'We, therefore, need to break with the old idea that evil could be met by evil. That when war comes freedom goes; law, conscience, and everything that religious men and women hold dear, will be swept away. Expediency reigns supreme. There is a clash today between the nations that control the world and others who also want a share. Our task is to decide whether the question is to be settled peacefully or in a great smash.

'There is untold potential wealth in the world and it is waiting to be used, yet the only effective use made of this wealth so

far has been in the preparation for mutual destruction. Pacifists are not merely dreamers, but realists, for it was surely manifest that war did not bring peace. It is possible to find a way out of our present difficulties by a new world conference, and I hope that our country will take the lead in making a new civilisation wherein we all would be sharers.'

But sadly, it was not to be.

After World War II, the Peace Fellowship's concerns broadened to include working towards international goodwill and cooperation between nations, and working against the threat of nuclear weapons. Our 1959 vision statement reads: 'A fellowship within our Churches of those who bear witness to the belief that war is a sin against God and a crime against humanity, and that only under the sanctions of the Law of Love is it possible to establish right relations between citizens and nations, and who therefore pledge themselves to the promotion of international goodwill and peace.'

Our trawl through the archives also revealed some copies of an old UPF Newsletter, which revealed that the committee's concerns have not changed very much over the years. Just recently, we have suggested developing a regional peace witness team. The October 1959 newsletter reported: 'It was proposed to try to establish local organisations or area branches of the U&FC Peace Fellowship in five or six areas of the British Isles. We need volunteers to start these. At present we have only one committee centred in Manchester. We ought to have committees centred in Scotland, Ireland, Wales, the Midlands, London and the South, etc.' We have also tried to hold an annual conference at the Nightingale Centre in Great Hucklow in the last couple of years; this was also suggested in the 1959 newsletter.

What goes around, comes around.

So, 100 years after its foundation in the dark days of World War I, the Unitarian and Free Christian Peace Fellowship continues to witness for, and work for peace. Our current vision statement, adopted at our AGM in 2013, reads: 'The Unitarian Peace Fellowship was founded in 1916 in the darkest days of the First World War to witness for peace and against the futility of war. Today we maintain that witness. Our vision includes the ethos and values of the Charter for Compassion. The surest route to peace is through compassion of human beings for each other and for all living things. We support and encourage Unitarians in their witness for Peace and Compassion locally, nationally, and internationally.'

We have continued to work within the denomination, as well as outside. The Unitarian General Assembly passed no less than seven peace-related resolutions during the 1930s, a further two during World War II, and 30 since then. But war and suffering and injustice have continued to wreak havoc across the world. So there is much still to be done, and strong, active members are needed. Please join us!

*The Rev Sue Woolley is secretary of the Unitarian & Free Christian Peace Fellowship*

See: [www.ukunitarians.org.uk/peace/](http://www.ukunitarians.org.uk/peace/)





# By imagining empathy perhaps f

(Continued from page 3)

and now Russian dimensions to this Gordian Knot of potential war. Within Israel itself the beguiling Utopian dream of a promised land for the outcast Jews, which began as an idyll is now ending in a dangerous prison, a fortress, ending in eternal insecurity, both external and internal. And potentially it could end in a horror which could engulf the civilised world, including you and me and our children and grandchildren. Every week there are Israelis murdered, sometimes just by knives and, usually, at least three times the number of Palestinians are killed in reprisals. The situation has reached such a pitch of spontaneous violence within fortress Israel alone that any softening of the violence by either side is viewed by the other as a sign of weakness and is ruthlessly exploited in a fresh round of nothing but more violence without end.

## Set-up for despair

I suppose that anyone who was foolish enough to set themselves up with a headline for an article like 'Israel and Peace: Is forgiveness possible?' must expect to end in despair. So the purpose of this article cannot be to solve the problems that Israel presents to the world. Yet the reason I chose this title is that in the last few months I have had a personal experience which suggests to me that there might yet be a glimmer of hope.

For years I have had no respect or sympathy for Israel and its leaders. Indeed, if Hamas had eliminated it, as it keeps on reminding us it will do whenever it sees a chance, I might not have said, 'Serves these Israelis right'. But thoughts like that would not have been far away in my mind. Yet recently my attitudes have changed and reminded me that peace begins in the mind. So I ask your forgiveness in advance for a rather rambling history of my personal impressions of Israel.

My father, who never took me to the cinema or allowed me to go to the cinema on my own, suddenly took me at aged 10 to view the newsreels about the liberation of Belsen concentration camp. I was meant to remember – and I have never forgotten. Later, I have a memory of seeing pictures somewhere of the Israeli immigrant ships; old and battered and occasionally sinking, carrying the poor and the desperate like the Mediterranean immigrant ships of today. At that point I felt nothing but pity and support for these poor people.

But what I did not know then, and it must have been strictly censored, was that there was, in progress, an ethnic cleansing where these people were landing, an ethnic cleansing every bit as savage as the cleansings of the Balkans that gave the phenomenon its very name. I remember later being faintly puzzled by all those refugees in Jordan, Lebanon. Why, in a civilised European-type democratic state, did they not want to stay there? And as the evidence of that ethnic cleansing became clearer, my sympathy for the Israeli government and people turned to utter disappointment and disgust.

## Why not 'do unto others ...'

In my simple adolescent ethics, how could a people which had suffered degradation, oppression, alienation, ethnic cleansing and attempted genocide not have learned the deep human lesson of 'Do unto others as you would be done to yourself' which is the very core of the ethics of all the post iron-age major religions around the known world? Even a body politic which contained the flower of European democratic and ethical thinking could do that on top of their own recent experiences of suffering?

None of that disgust disrupted my relationships with the Jews of the diaspora. Even they came back from visiting Israel seeming to dislike the Sabra, the original Israelis, who seemed to behave arrogantly, like God's-anointed, the master race and, of course, God's chosen. Then there was the emotional blackmail of the holocaust trailed around the world with the implicit message we, and especially the Germans, owed the Israeli Jews irreparable debts, as if they were the only victims of genocide ever. Then came news of the war crimes, the appalling massacres of the refugee camps in the Lebanon, the brutal use of superior force and technology in the likes of Jenin and in Gaza. And the policy of relentless expansion of the settlements



A Palestinian mural by Banksy titled 'Beach'. Photo by Markus Ort

in the lands won by conquest, a policy that has been called incremental or creeping genocide, continued. These were, by any standards, war crimes and I concluded that only the USA protected the Israelis again and again from international condemnation and reprisals, and in doing so, soured relations between the West and the whole Muslim world.

## Fortress Israel

Today we have fortress Israel behind a wall more forbidding and technically efficient than the old disgrace of the Berlin wall. We have a state with a more efficient apartheid system than South Africa ever had, and a nuclear bomb which threatens the destruction of at least the Middle East if the racist Israeli state is ever likely to be annihilated. And we have those ultra-orthodox Jews who believe they are God's chosen people and, I sometimes imagine, are prepared to ensure that if they are threatened with destruction, the world should end in a nuclear winter with them.

And yet. And yet.

Recently my view of the state of Israel changed. I read Ari Shavit's book *My Promised Land: The Triumph and Tragedy of Israel*. Shavit's story begins in innocence with his grandfather planning to leave Eastern Europe, leaving the persecutions and massacres there and picking out a plot of land that he could buy from its Arab owners. The story continues in innocence through an idyllic period in the early 1930s when the agricultural businesses of Israel prospered and Jaffa oranges made a name throughout America and Europe. The Jewish landowners seemed never to trespass on land that was not legitimately bought, and they turned land that was hopelessly infertile into a bloom in the desert and maintained good and very friendly relations with their Arab neighbours



# Givenness, then peace, may come



Media Commons

and employees. They lived the Utopian dream of their forefathers.

Then change came as idealists and the politicians on both sides began to sow fear and suspicion. Muslim preachers on the one side were matched with nationalist and even racist agitators on the other. Sporadic acts of violence by both sides against the other became more common. It became clear, what had been suspected by some Jewish thinkers from the very beginning, that there was no room in the land for two peoples living together in peace.

In 1938, when he moved to Israel, Martin Buber still dreamed and wrote of a land in which Jews and Arabs lived harmoniously side-by-side. But these dreams were not any part of the mainstream Jewish thinking that was to form the ideology of Israel, thinking about the story of Masada, in the 1st century CE where no Jew ever surrendered and all died in the end. In the 1940s, the Jews of Palestine prepared to take over all the land when the British inevitably left. And in 1948 that is what they began.

## Honesty about ethnic cleansing

Many Jewish writers are now wholly honest about the ethnic cleansing that took place as the British left. In all its thorough and efficient savagery it led to the flight of those millions of refugees who, still seething with revenge and vowing to take back their land, feed into the wrath of Hamas and the Hezbollah, awaiting their chance to destroy. Thus the Israeli State began the process that made it into the state I had no respect for.

Even if you did not share my earlier opinions and feelings, you should understand that, not long ago, I could have supported an act of war against the Israeli State.

For the first time, I changed my perspective and allowed myself to identify

with the Israelis. I suddenly thought I could see how they rebounded from viewing themselves as a people eternally subjected to degradation and subjection in Europe to the extent that they had become self-loathers who saw themselves as a perennially weak and powerless people. I imagine now that I can understand how the Israelis became, in their turn, the masters in their own land and how they developed new self-feelings of strength and pride not only in themselves but also in their state and their history and their people. As I read, a theory began to develop which brought me to imagine that I now understood much more of what had so repelled me for so long. This is an intuitive theory, an unprovable theory, the kind of psychological theory that my father used to tease me about, saying it was 'a beautiful theory unclouded by a single fact'. But it has changed my attitudes hugely.

## Another 'beautiful theory'

I remembered how I had observed elsewhere various groups that had once felt oppressed and undervalued and saw how they began to behave as they asserted their newfound self-value. I saw that they tended to rebound from lack of assertion and even submission to *over* assertion. So I guessed that, as Israel gained strength and became more prosperous, some people rebounded from inappropriate humility to equally inappropriate over-assertiveness. I saw that as an understandable human over-reaction. My intuitive theory, unclouded by a single fact, became that as the Israelis became the master race in their own land and began pulsating with a new confidence in their heritage of European and American military and technical superiority, they began to behave in the same way towards others as the gentiles of Europe had once behaved towards them. Further, as they moved from under-dog to over-dog, with no experience of a ruling class that knew how to treat people with decency and respect, they may even have become unconscious imitators of the Nazis. To me, the Israelis suddenly became only too human if they rebounded too far.

My change in attitude to Israel came about because I let myself identify with their oppression, with their Utopian longing for a better life and even with their overcompensation and lack of good role models in the inevitable exercise of power that came with conquest. As the French saying goes, 'To understand is to forgive'.

I had moved from being a potential supporter of war to a mind-set that promoted peace. And that is why I want to show that peace begins in the mind and that perhaps, by extension, even in the most vicious hatreds and conflict there is still some possibility of change and thus of peace.

## Imaginative empathy is one tool

I remember a Quaker who was an inspiration to me at aged 18. He led a group which practised imaginative empathy in understanding the Russian experience at the very height of the cold war. I have never forgotten how powerful an engine for peace the imaginative and compassionate empathy he practiced beyond just individuals but on a group scale can be.

Of course I despair. I wrote earlier that I would leave you not much more cheerful than I found you. And I can only offer my own impracticable solution. Even so, I repeat my belief that the hope always lies in the beginnings of peace in the mind. It begins with a person at peace with themselves; a person who is not afraid of oneself, or angry with oneself, or carrying a burden of guilt or self-loathing or a person haunted by insistent worries and fears. Such a person, which most of us *can be*, at least from time to time, can reach out in imaginative and compassionate empathy to understand and feel with the other person's world. And that includes the world of the other tribe, the world of the potential enemy.

*Excerpted from an address given on  
Peace Sunday by Iain Brown at the Glasgow  
Unitarian Church.*





# Unitarians are important to WCF

By Marcus Braybrooke

Unitarians have made an important contribution to the World Congress of Faiths (WCF), which this year marks its 80th anniversary.

When I joined 50 years ago Reg Sorensen, soon to be Lord Sorensen, was the chairman. He was a tireless worker for numerous causes, a convinced pacifist, one of the first British politicians to advocate Indian independence, and a skilled ventriloquist. He emphasised the shared moral values of the world's faiths: but feared that his book, *I Believe in Man*, in which he criticised 'religions' opposition to new knowledge, to scientific advance and to social progress' would be too strong meat for WCF members.

In 1965 Lord Sorensen asked me to become an honorary secretary of WCF, with the Rev Tom Dalton a Unitarian minister in North London. The Rev John Rowland was treasurer, until the Rev Eirion Phillips, Minister of Essex Unitarian Church in Notting Hill, took his place.

The World Congress of Faiths was founded by Sir Francis Younghusband, an explorer and mystic. The first Congress was held in London in 1936. There is only one mention of Unitarianism in the proceedings and that is by Yusuf Ali, the great Muslim scholar and a translator of the Qur'an, who claimed that 'Unitarianism is practically Islam.'

Although, after Younghusband's death in 1942, WCF struggled on during the war and post-war years, it attracted little support. With the Empire in decline, fewer people had direct contact with people of other faiths and it was not until the 1970s that Muslim, Sikh and Hindu immigrants began to establish places of worship. Even so, as late as 1980, Clifford Longley of *The Times*, complained how, except for WCF, the churches showed almost no interest in other faith communities.

Unitarians and Quakers were the exceptions. The moving spirit during the 1950s was the Rev Arthur Peacock, who became the Hon Secretary in 1951. In 1937 he became a minister of the Universalist Church, which was quite a strong denomination in the USA, but in Britain was always very small and gradually disappeared. In 1951 Peacock became a Unitarian minister. He did much to help build up the Social Service Department of the Unitarian Church. His motto was a verse from Elizabeth Barrett-Browning: 'Universalism – universe religion – the unity of all things, Why it's the greatest word in our language.'

Unitarians were often leading members of local WCF branches.

Stewart Carter, for example, was active in the Cambridge branch of WCF. My wife Mary, for a time, attended the Sunday School at the Unitarian Church, so when, in the face of widespread opposition from Christians, I helped to arrange 'All Faiths services,' she said 'Oh yes, I remember them as a child.' In Kent, the WCF group met regularly in the Unitarian chapel there where John William Dyer was minister and where earlier Will Hayes, who in 1924 published his Universalist and interfaith *Book of Twelve Services*,

had ministered. The Steiners kept the Wellingborough branch alive for many years.

More recently, the Rev Richard Boeke, who has worked tirelessly for peace and interfaith fellowship, was chairperson for several years. The Rev Feargus O'Connor is now honorary secretary. Many WCF events have been held at his church in Golders Green, including an Annual Service for animal rights. Indeed Unitarians across the country have often hosted WCF events and Mary and I usually take a couple of services each year at Harris Manchester College chapel.

There has also been a long link with the International Association for Religious Freedom (IARF) and I have attended several congresses. Diether Gerhmann and I worked together to promote events to mark the centenary of the World Parliament of Religions. Subsequently, IARF, then led by Robert Traer, and WCF helped to establish the International Interfaith Centre in Oxford.

The need for interfaith co-operation, in our troubled world, is as urgent as ever. It is good that there are now many interfaith initiatives, but WCF is unusual in that people belong as individuals not as representatives of a religion. This means that those who see themselves as 'spiritual and not religious' are welcome as are members of all faith communities. Being based on individual membership also allows WCF freedom to take new initiatives, as it has done in arranging interfaith services and retreats. Moreover, while emphasising the need for all people of faith and goodwill to work for peace, the protection of human rights and of the environment, and helping those in need, WCF also provides an opportunity for spiritual enrichment as we share our religious practices and beliefs.

You will be most welcome to come to any of this anniversary year's special events. For information, see the website: [www.worldfaiths.org](http://www.worldfaiths.org) or ask for a sample copy of the journal *Interreligious Insight*. We would welcome invitations to talk about WCF and, of course, new members to ensure that Unitarians continue to make their important contribution to WCF.

Marcus Braybrooke's updated *Widening Vision: the World Congress of Faiths and the Growing Interfaith Movement* gives a vivid history of WCF. You can buy it with PayPal at [www.marcusbraybrooke.com](http://www.marcusbraybrooke.com) or send a cheque for £12.95 to 17 Courtiers Green, Clifton Hampden, Abingdon, OX14 3EN

Upcoming WCF events

16 April: 'The Legacy of Wilfred Cantwell Smith' at Croydon Unitarian Church. More information on page 12. Contact [r.boeke@virgin.net](mailto:r.boeke@virgin.net)

17 May: 'Bringing Faiths Together' at The Winter Gardens, Eastbourne. Contact [marcusbraybrooke4@gmail.com](mailto:marcusbraybrooke4@gmail.com)

10 July: Summer Garden Party at the Royal Foundation of St Katherine, London. Guest speaker; Harmander Singh. It is essential to book a place. Contact [jenny@worldfaiths.org](mailto:jenny@worldfaiths.org)

The Rev Marcus Braybrooke is joint-president of the WCF.



Members of the International Association for Religious Freedom celebrated Human Rights Day with a cake at Essex Hall. Unitarian ministers Richard Boeke (centre, rear), Chris Hudson (holding knife) Feargus O'Connor (right) and Unitarian Chief officer Derek McAuley joined in the celebration.



# Losing earwax and gaining inspiration

I was out walking the other day when I experienced one of those gorgeous moments of awakening. As I did, beautiful words by ee cummings came into my mind, 'Now the ears of my ears awake And now the eyes of my eyes are opened'. Once again, the ears of my ears had awoken and the eyes of my eyes had opened to something new. In fact it felt as though all my senses had opened like they had never done before.

Now one of the reasons for this was that I had just had my ears cleared. I had been suffering quite badly with my hearing and – at last – the treatment had worked and I could hear clearly once again. I had also in recent times had trouble with my voice, I felt like I had lost my voice somewhat. Thankfully, this seems to have been resolved. I have, as I have many times, re-found my voice.

The changes in my voice have been due to the weight loss over the last few months. So many of the physical aspects of my being have changed and this has taken some re-adjustment in my living and being. I feel I can hear in a new way and I can speak once again. I have also noticed other changes in all my senses, including what they call the sixth sense ... my senses have been awakened as I have heard life's call.

Now as I was walking I noticed I could hear many new bird songs and just as I looked up and noticed birds I had not paid attention to before, a smell filled my nostrils that reawakened a childhood memory. My mind turned to a time, when I would have been about 11, working in my dad's butcher's shop, making sausages and beef burgers, a job I used to delight in doing. I smiled as I walked. And, as I did, lots of other memories came flooding back into my current consciousness. Memories that brought joy and happiness at this moment, and ones that in the past brought only tears and pain. Memory, or at least the way I remember, has changed so much over time.

They say that you cannot rewrite history and that you cannot change the past. I am not convinced by this. I have noticed that as time has passed so much of my life – or at least how I remember my life – has changed. Don't get me wrong. It's not that the events have changed – just how I remember them. The darkness and the pain are still there, only now they are in the correct proportion. Today, the difficult memories are surrounded and filled by the joy and the love that was always there too.

Memory is a fascinating thing, and I do believe it is connected to the way we experience life in the present. I suspect that it is connected to our senses and how awake they are to our current experiences. In the same way that what we feel about our past influences impacts on our current lives. Therefore, it was no surprise that the opening of my senses brought a new experience of my past.

Now the sense of smell has long been connected to memory. Neuroscience suggests that upon detecting a smell the olfactory neurones in the upper part of the nose generate an impulse which is passed to the brain along the olfactory nerve. The part of the brain this arrives at first is called the olfactory bulb, which processes the signal and then passes information about the smell to other areas closely connected to it, collectively

## From nothing to Everything by Danny Crosby



known as the limbic system.

The limbic system comprises a set of structures within the brain that are regarded as playing a major role in controlling mood, memory, behaviour and emotion. This affects areas of what is often referred to as 'the old brain', so-called as they were present within the brains of the very first mammals. It is suggested that those with full olfactory function may be able to think of smells that evoke particular memories and that this can happen spontaneously. This is exactly what happened to me while out walking, as I felt my senses had reawakened, once again, as long forgotten memories came alive in my current consciousness.

Just as how I experience the present moment affects how I remember the past, I also believe it is important to understand that how I remember impacts on how I experience the present moment and also how I look into the future. As I look at times in my own spiritual journey I regret my attempts to reject my past. I now know that to truly bring the moment alive, rather than to just passively live in the moment, I must bring the experience of my whole life into my experience of life right here and right now. That includes those memories that cause pain and distress. Attempting to fully let go of them is neither healthy nor possible.

These thoughts brought to mind a favourite Bible passage from Mark's Gospel (Ch7:31-37) of Jesus healing a deaf-mute man. I once heard the Rev Bill Darlison preach on this. He posited that the passage and this particular section of Mark's Gospel attempt to teach us of the need to live more open and connected lives. He pointed out that the author is trying to make us listen by using a clever linguistic aid. In the account he states that Jesus says the Aramaic word Ephphatha as he heals the man. This is perhaps not so strange on the surface as this is certainly the language that Jesus would have spoken. What is strange though is that this is inconsistent with the rest of the Gospel which was originally written in Greek. Bill says that this is a deliberate ploy to make us who are listening to the account pay attention, because something really important is being taught here. The word Ephphatha means Open up! Open up your senses to all that is around you.

I have come to believe that in order to live fully awake, mentally, physically and spiritually, requires one to be awake to all that is, all that has been and all that has ever been. It is of no use just merely living in the present, in a passive sense, to merely be the observer. The spiritual life is one of engagement – of being fully alive. I believe to be fully engaged and alive to what is occurring right here, we also need to be awake to all that has been too and to therefore give ourselves fully to what is yet to come.

This requires us to have all our senses fully awake and fully engaged. That includes the sixth sense. In so doing we will be able to live fully engaged and meaningful lives.

We need to awaken all our senses and thus not only hear life's call but to also respond to it ...

*The Rev Danny Crosby is minister at Altrincham and Urmston.*

Subscribe to The Inquirer  
Join the conversation  
Keep the Unitarian flame lit  
[www.inquirer.org.uk](http://www.inquirer.org.uk)



# Letters to the Editor

## 'Christian' and 'Free Christian' not the same

To the Editor:

I enjoyed reading James Barry's article on our name (*Inquirer*, 2 January 2016) and I agree with and support what he says. However I think he's labouring under a misapprehension, as many of us do, in thinking that the "and Free Christian" has anything to do with our Christian identity as such. Historically this is not the case. The 19th-century debate that created our double name was between those who thought we should call ourselves 'Unitarian Christians' and those who thought 'Free Christians' was a better label. The 'Christian' part of both was assumed and uncontroversial at that time. The Free Christians wanted a broader, more inclusive name. In a way the Free Christians won, in seeking to define ourselves inclusively, but the 'Unitarian' label stuck.

When the General Assembly was formed in 1928 it could just as easily have been 'the General Assembly of Free and Unitarian Christian Churches'.

The point is that 'Free' and 'Unitarian' were two alternative descriptions of a type of Christian church.

The 19th-century debate is pretty irrelevant to us now, which is why I never use the term 'Free Christian' myself. But we should at least not be so ignorant of our history in thinking that 'the Free Christian' end of our movement is the same thing as the 'Christian' end of our movement. That is not the case and it's a mistake to muddle up a 19th-century debate with a 21st-century debate that is quite different.

**Stephen Lingwood**

Minister, Bank Street Unitarian Chapel, Bolton

## VW should be accountable for diesel fumes, deaths

To the Editor:

I was interested to read Graham Murphy's article on the VW scandal, as it fitted with my family's recent thinking on the subject of air pollution. My husband, Hugh, died last August of lung cancer, despite having never smoked in his life. He had however, as

had most of the folk of our age, grown up in a world where cigarette smoke filled all public buildings, as well as buses and trains. So 'passive smoking' could not have been avoided. Shortly after his death, we read a report on air pollution, especially from diesel fumes on our roads, and realised that this might have been a contributory cause in Hugh's case.

In the entire 45 years I knew him, he had cycled every day to work, as well as for pleasure, in some cases more than 10 miles each way. After we retired to the south-west coast he continued to cycle into the town most days – mouth wide open, inhaling hard – especially on the steep hill leading from the town up to our home.

Could there have been any connection between Hugh's illness and the recorded increased readings of air pollution? We may never know for sure, but it provides food for thought!

**Elizabeth Barlow**

Seaton, Devon

# Name change could make a difference

**By Neville Kenyon**

James Barry (*The Inquirer*, 2 January) once again addresses the problem of our corporate name – The General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches. He is right, of course – in marketing terms the title is a real turn-off. So why do we persist in hanging on to it? Every communication from a General Assembly source mentions Unitarians with the inevitable suffix of 'and Free Christians'.

The word 'free' in this context was of its time and nowadays persists largely with the Wee Frees in Scotland and the Free Presbyterians in Ulster – neither of which reflects the freedom of belief which most Unitarians cherish. They may be free governmentally but are restrictive in belief and dogma. Not quite the sort of faith groups with which most Unitarians would relate.

I am reminded of the campaign some of us waged in the 1990s to change the marketing name of The Unitarian Holiday and Convalescent Homes at Great Hucklow. There was substantial opposition from the General Assembly Council at the time, which rather reluctantly gave the campaigners leave to call it The Nightingale Centre for a 'trial period'. The change gave the centre

a new lease of life. Many new, non-Unitarian groups were attracted and it became the vibrant and successful enterprise we can all enjoy today. The old title does not even appear on Charity Commission references – it is dead and buried as a feature relevant to its time of origin but no longer appropriate.

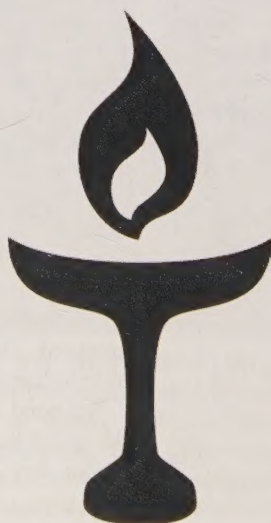
Our local authority recently changed its everyday name from Bury Metropolitan Borough Council to simply Bury Council. This proves that even the most bureaucratic of institutions can offer a friendly face to the world by a simple title adjustment.

Cynics may also offer the example of the Social and Liberal Democrat Party which ultimately adopted the friendly term 'Lib Dems', which proves, I suppose, that even a snappy title cannot always guarantee electoral success.

Commercial enterprises are always looking for new ideas for promoting themselves. Even our Unitarian movement once adopted a 'consistent identity', which is now largely forgotten apart from the pleasing chalice design which still shines brightly. But we were perhaps rather over-optimistic in trying to introduce anything 'consistent' into our organisation.

Alas, I fear we are likely to be committed,

(Continued on next page)





# Eric Wild: from 'Wishee Washee' to the pulpit

Eric Wild, who died on New Year's Eve aged 95 years, was born in High Lane, Cheshire, the eldest of three children of Alfred and Florence Wild, she having been connected with Leicester Great Meeting. The family moved to Adswold, Stockport and joined the Unitarian congregation, where Eric came under the influence of its minister John Kielty, who remained a deeply significant figure in Eric's life. The lively youth group there included social activities, where Eric's love of theatre and acting flourished. He enjoyed recalling how he had played Wishee Washee to John Kielty's Widow Twankey in *Aladdin*, and there was an unforgettable youth hostelling holiday in pre-war Germany.



Eric Wild

Leaving school aged 15, he became a junior clerk in the Corporation Electricity Department, but when war broke out he enlisted in the Royal Ordnance Corps in a clerical role where, he recalled, 'I typed my way from Tobruk to Mersa Matruh and thence to Cairo.' As the war neared its end, he responded to John Kielty's suggestion to consider the Unitarian ministry, turned up for his interview still in uniform and entered Unitarian College, gaining a BA (Theol) in 1950.

His first ministry was in Swinton in 1951. He was one of the highly charismatic, post-war ministerial generation, along with Ron McGraw and Keith Treacher, in the era of the newly created NHS and Welfare State. Unlike several of them, however, who moved into an emerging Social Work profession, Eric remained firmly in the ministry all his life. He gained a reputation as a lively preacher, snappy dresser and developer of youth activities and dramatic productions. He

moved to Warrington in 1955 for eight years, where he met Winifred (Win) who would in time become his wife. The next move was to Sheffield Unity with Stannington, during which time he paid a return visit to Warrington to marry Win in 1964. She and her son Roger moved to Sheffield and a new family was formed.

Eric's ministry is remembered with warmth and affection, especially for his engaging sense of humour, wonderful children's stories with Paddington Bear, his pastoral attentiveness and his delight in foreign travel. In 1974 he moved to Bristol, a challenging situation. Schemes to dispose of the large Lewin's Meade chapel building and associated property did not go to plan, making for a difficult last ministry. During that period,

however, Frenchay Chapel was re-opened, Eric took it under his wing and after retirement, he and the family stayed in Bristol and attended Frenchay.

In 1994 they moved to Timperley, to be near both his and Win's family and to join Dunham Road Chapel, Altrincham, where they became an important part of the community. Dramatic interests were revived when he took part in congregational entertainments, including playing William Gaskell in Barbara Brill's *At Home with the Gaskells*. Proximity to Stockport also gave him the opportunity to research his other great love, the history of local theatres.

Over the years Eric played his part in the Unitarian denomination. For many years he was Chair of the Homes Management Committee at Great Hucklow and was even temporary manager for a short emergency period before his great friend and co-worker for the Centre, Henry Tittle, became manager. Eric and Henry were two of the key people who encouraged what later became the Nightingale Centre to become the responsibility of the General Assembly.

Eric was an early member of the then GA Worship Subcommittee and along with John Kielty's daughter Eila Forrester helped to create quiet rooms at GA Annual Meetings and at IARF Congress in Heidelberg. He and Eila conducted a memorable and innovative Anniversary Service at the GA Annual Meetings. He also served on the Social Responsibility Committee and assisted the GA Religious Education Department by producing one of their many occasional services, this one entitled *My Church*. In 1981-2 he served as President of the GA and thoroughly enjoyed his year, visiting many parts of the UK, and speaking positively in favour of improved pensions for ministers.

He leaves his wife, Win, son Roger and nieces and nephews, by whom he was cared for in his later years, and by whom he will be sadly missed. He will be much missed too by ministerial colleagues, one of whom summed him up, saying, 'I shall always think of him with a smile on his face and a twinkle in his eye!'

— John Midgley

## One group could help

(Continued from previous page)

for some time yet, to our cumbersome title. Were there to be a motion at the Annual Meetings to make it more friendly, the proposer would be accused of being 'anti-Christian' and bent on moving us all to the left. It would be said through a gnashing of teeth that the humanists or the agnostics or the earth-centred 'wings' were determined to see the Christians sidelined.

As James Barry says, we who wish for a more appropriate title are not anti those with liberal Christian convictions. The problem is that potential adherents, used to responding to 21st-century stimuli, are likely to be left cold by our antiquated nomenclature.

There is one group however that could make the difference. That is the Unitarian Christian Association who would gain the appreciation and respect of all Unitarians if they agreed to omit the 'and Free Christian' from our everyday title. I am pretty sure that their support for such a change would gain overwhelming sympathy.

Neville Kenyon is a member of Bury Unitarians



## Denton church offers trans-gender baptisms

New Chapel Unitarian and Free Christian in Denton is offering baptisms to the transgender community.

The congregation passed a motion at its Annual General Meeting in January. New Chapel, formerly Wilton Street Chapel has pioneered and championed change in Denton since the formation of the congregation in 1875.

When the amendment to the UK marriage law was implemented, New Chapel were the first Unitarian Chapel within the district to register their building to perform same sex marriages which was a milestone for not only the couples who wish to marry but also the Unitarian movement and Denton itself.

The motion was proposed by Worship Leader Mrs Jean Clements.

In 2014 Jean performed a celebration of marriage for a

### MDA meeting considered three issues

The Unitarian Manchester District Association met in December at Dean Row Chapel.

The Rev Jeff Gould welcomed participants and led the Opening Devotions prior to hearing three talks on the future of the MDA. They provided interesting and contrasting views, though with some we were already familiar.

The Rev John Clifford, president of the Unitarian General Assembly, spoke first, stressing that we must not pass on our heritage without change, and to this end better communication between congregations, the Districts and the GA is vital. In discussion, he said that the GA Executive Committee, having existed for 10 years, might need four more to achieve its most effective working.

Unitarians' historic commitment to works as well as faith means that we should continue to concern ourselves with global as well as national and local issues: the environment, sexual exploitation and migration.

Prof Geoffrey Levermore's theme was 'Questions and Options for the Future'. Within the Manchester area there were thousands of students who could benefit from counselling from young ministers such as Steven Lingwood (Bank Street, Bolton) has been giving. At Council Meetings, chapels should give full reports about the more practical matters such as their energy efficiency as well as about their ideas. How the MDA distributed limited financial support was a moot point.

Rev Danny Crosby interpreted energy as that force which powered their congregations both spiritually and physically. We spread ourselves too thinly: look at what we can do locally, he said. Technology with its social media is there for wider issues but some congregations may need to look for help in bringing this about.

The formalities over, we adjourned to the hall for further discussion based on material provided by Jeff Gould.

Within the time, it was inevitable that some aspects were overlooked in the meeting: the roles played by youth groups and the Nightingale Unitarian Conference Centre at Great Hucklow seem important to the future of the MDA and the survival of the movement. Very many thanks to Penny Johnson for organising this event.

— Dennis Crompton

same-sex couple who have a transgender child. As they are a family of strong faith, it was important to them and the child to have a baptism recognising the new name and new gender in celebration of the transformation and acceptance within the community.

Jean says, 'I felt saddened by the fact that this family were being shunned by many mainstream churches. However, when the family came to New Chapel, the congregation welcomed the family with open arms. The congregation at Denton are a multi-generational community who are very willing to accept change and progress within society. I think of us as a modern church for a modern society.'

The Unitarian movement stands for freedom, reason and tolerance. At New Chapel we are working towards and proud of our inclusive community, not an exclusive one.

I must stress however, that this motion was passed by New Chapel's committee and congregation and it is for other Unitarian Chapels within the neighbouring districts to decide for themselves whether they wish to offer similar services.'

Jean goes on to say, 'The baptism itself, would be very similar to an adult baptism and as with all my Rites of Passage services, I pride myself in working alongside people to ensure the service is tailor-made to suit people's requirements.'

The support I have had from the wider Unitarian community about this matter has been overwhelming and I am very proud of our achievements as a chapel. While I am being congratulated for our progress on this particular matter, I would like to thank one courageous girl for inspiring me to think carefully about this issue in the first place.'

— Jean Clements

### Croydon Unitarians host WCF/IARF event

On 16 April, a joint event is planned with the International Association for Religious Freedom and the World Council of Faiths. Organised by Unitarian ministers Richard Boeke and Chris Hudson, it will take place at Croydon Unitarian Church. Speakers include Marcus Braybrooke, co-president of the World Council of Faiths, Dr Iyadh Daoud, chair of Crawley Interfaith, Jayde Russell of the London Central Mosque and Ian Mason, President of the School for Economic Science.

For information contact Richard Boeke: [r.boeke@virgin.net](mailto:r.boeke@virgin.net)

### BRADFORD UNITARIANS

and the

### YORKSHIRE UNITARIAN UNION

seek to appoint a full-time minister for Bradford (50%) and the YUU (50%).

Bradford is a progressive congregation and the YUU district is cohesive and proactive.

Further details either through the usual GA protocol or informally from David Dawson ([dcdawson3@hotmail.com](mailto:dcdawson3@hotmail.com))